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ABSTRACT

Brigham Young University has implemented a policy of allowing non-language majors, often with limited second-language proficiency, to study abroad. A study examined the effect of a six-month study program in Vienna (Austria) on the academic achievement and post-reentry language registrations of 224 students. Study-abroad students were matched with a control group of non-study-abroad students by age, sex, grade point average (GPA), major, and total credit hours earned. Comparison across the groups focused on changes in GPA, shifts in major, and post-reentry language registrations. No appreciable variation in GPA and no obvious trends in change of major were found. However, substantial differences between groups were found in language enrollments during the period after the study abroad session. Analysis of the data suggests that students who include study abroad in their language plans have a three to one chance of completing their third year and becoming reasonably fluent, over students who begin study on campus and do not study abroad, regardless of language training begun before the year of study abroad. It is suggested that language programs reexamine what they can offer nonmajors, even in study abroad, to arouse more interest in language study. (MSE)

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THE IMPACT OF STUDY ABROAD ON ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE: GERMAN LANGUAGE REGISTRATIONS

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THE IMPACT OF STUDY ABROAD ON ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE

Two years ago I presented the results of a study that I had conducted with a group of 79 students who went to Salzburg with me for six months twelve years earlier. This study, reflected attitudes, interests and progress of students ten years after studying abroad. Some of the most interesting aspects of that study suggested substantial differences in language enrollments after the target semester between our Study Abroad students and the control group.1 This encouraged me to begin a subsequent study to attempt to guage or measure the impact of studying abroad as reflected in language study, specifically in post study abroad registrations in the target language.

My prejudice as a Professor of Language and also a Director of Study Abroad was to demonstrate that studying abroad, regardless of one's main academic interests or career goals, was a meaningful stimulus to language learning, and that encouraging students to go abroad was a legitimate way to attract students into languages, i.e. with students who otherwise would not be inclined to study a foreign language. In other words, one can promote study abroad with the objective to recruit students into language rather than the other way around, of recruiting in language classes to fill study abroad programs.

Study Abroad programs have long been a goal and highlight in the academic career for language students, and even students interested in the arts and social sciences often accept language as a relevant and meaningful skill to acquire in preparation for their careers. On our campus, however, less than 25% of our studentbody are currently enrolled in all foreign language classes combined and only 4% in German, which is my language and the target for our program in Vienna.2 For a faculty member to recruit for a program with a one-year language prerequisite, the target audience is automatically reduced from 27,000 on campus to less than 1000 who qualify in that first requirement. It becomes necessary then to attempt to build the programs for several years and to get students into language classes for a year so they can qualify. Our low current enrollments reflect the meager success we have had with this approach.

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1 Cf. Appendix A "Summary of Language Registrations" from my 1983 study.

2 Fall 1985 there are 6703 enrolled in languages from approx. 27,000 total, and 1078 total enrollments in German in Fall 1985.

As an administrator, I look across campus at the 75% of our studentbody not in foreign languages and ask how are they filling their general education requirements and why aren't more of them doing it abroad? The major obstacles seem to be finances and language requirements. With the first we can do precious little, although inovative ideas are bearing some fruit even there. But it is the second which has stimulated my thinking and which is the basis of my most recent study.

I am not addressing the issue of foreign study for language majors or minors, or even for those usually in the arts or social sciences who are willing to work a year or more of language classes into their scnedules. I am addressing that large group of students who are neither taking language now, nor intend to, because in their present set of values language learning ranks very low, and the pressure of moving through quickly towards a degree leaves no room for a full year of low priority courses. Consequently, basic general education credits are earned on campus in large impersonal classes and we turn out large groups of graduates without a meaningful perspective of the world or other benefits of cross-cultural awareness and consider them educated and qualified to make their way in an ever smaller, interdependent world.

A discussion of relevance of a language prerequisite for some of our programs becomes a moot question for this large percentage of our students. "Es kommt gar nicht in Frage" as one likes to say in German. In face of a language requirement for studying abroad a large majority will simply check out. They write it off and think no further. They make their judgements based on unknowns and thus select the familiar and secure. They have no second language, feel no need to learn one, and have no intention of registering for one, but some could still be interested in a program abroad that filled other requirements for general education credits which they need to take anyway, and thus some could be interested in a program which would not put them out of sinc with or delay their lock-step progression towards a degree.

Some of our colleagues would argue that if some of these students are unwilling to take the language then they are not committed enough to study abroad and probably should stay at home. This is narrow and simplistic. We are certainly not that rigid with ourselves when we travel to countries where we don't speak the language. There is much to be learned from abroad...even from countries where we may not speak the language. If we expect to make a significant contribution to internationalizing our curriculum, awakening an interest in international "things", and preparing a larger percentage of our students, then we must begin with what we have--that is on our campus a group of 75% of our studentbody not yet convinced of the

value of language study but in desperate need of some cross-cultural experience--though in some cases they may not even agree with this perceived need.

Of course certain experiences abroad will remain out of reach to all but the fluent foreign language speaker--exchanges, full matriculation in a foreign university, internships and such language dependent activities are among these. We also should put aside the reality that we in the field all concede, that no matter what one does abroad, one can do it better with the language than without it. Such arguments, although we know them to be meaningful, are irrelevant with students who have not yet experienced another culture and do not yet share our commitment to intense and relatively personal inter-cultural learning.

But if we hope to make inroads among the culturally illiterate among large segments of our studentbodies--and several national studies and sessions at this conference confirm our urgent need to do that--then we must recognize that our only options for reaching a large segment, usually a majority, of our students might be limited to getting them into appropriate classes here, which we are frequently not too successful with, or to "sell the sizzle before the steak", get them abroad any way we can, yes, heaven forbid, even without the language if necessary. Programs can be built around the arts, humanities, social sciences and a broad spectrum of other disciplines that can be relevant, helpful, and have a strong appeal for students who must fill general education requirements anyway. These programs would probably best emphasize group housing, instruction in English, and a good percentage of time spent out of the classroom, on site.

My contention is that even with the "non-language" students, if we can get them abroad through whatever muse or appeal to their sense for the exotic, their "wanderlust" or however, for a substantial length of time...two months should be minimum and six months is better and probably long enough, then with a well concieved and directed program with imaginative and enthusiastic faculty we can awaken an interest and even a love of other cultures and achieve a level of appreciation for "things cross--cultural" that can never be reached on campus.

And we can bring them back converts. Their new perspectives will be reflected in broader interests, and--and this is the point of my study--additional elective enrollments in the foreign language, where without the experience abroad, none could be expected.

Thus we compromise a little up front, by encouraging non-language students to go abroad on general education programs, give them a good introduction to the culture, the arts, the loves, hopes, and dreams of the people...and even the language,

and bring them back to campus excited and inspired to keep these new interests and loves alive. The bottom line being a good experience for a group of students who otherwise most likely would not get abroad, plus an increased interest and a bonus of at least some enrollments in the language after they return. And this is with students, you remember, who most likely without the encouragement to study abroad would have taken no language at all.

We compromise somewhat on the depth and perhaps quality of the cross-cultural learning experience for some of these students because of their limited language, but when one compares even this with the alternative of them staying home and getting nothing of the rich experience that is available abroad, even with limited or beginning langauge, then such general education courses taken abroad seem preferable to taking them at home.

We are dealing with students who would never enroll for the language if it were not for the attraction of studying abroad. Thus without the experience abroad, most would have no language at all, so any enrollment whatsoever--while abroad or after the return--would seem to represent an increase and thus an improvement over the status quo.

Now to the problem. For the research target group I selected all the students who enrolled in our half-year in Vienna programs over a seven year period from 1974-80. Of that group, 224 had academic records on file for periods before and after the target semester--the target being their six-month period abroad. Those who came from other institutions and transferred credits away, or who came just for the program or dropped out immediately following the experience were not included in the study.

With the help of research services on campus we then identified a control group by pairing each of these students with a non-study abroad student who matched closely with the target student in each of the following five categories: age, sex, gpa, major, and total credit hours earned. With the two groups identified, a comparative study was done by dividing the work of each student in four groups: 1) pre-target; 2) target, or the half-year period that the study abroad student was abroad; 3) post study abroad, pre-graduation; and 4) graduate, and then comparing across the groups, looking for changes in the GPA, shifts in major, and, most significant for my study, foreign language registrations--specifically German.

Much of the results, or answers to many of my questions, were inconclusive or perhaps insignificant. I was unable to identify any appreciable variation in grade point averages, for example, between target and control groups before and after the target period. There were numerous shifts between majors, but no pattern evolved and no obvious trends or differences between

groups. Thus some of my pre-study prejudices needed to be set aside. Perhaps some of my notions regarding measurable impact of study abroad on student performance is not demonstrable in such an empirical study.

In the area of language registrations, however, there were dramatic results. Some conclusions will need to be tempered with an apology for the control group and its inability to control other factors effecting outcomes. Results are to a large extent predictable and confirm the original contention that studying abroad does awaken and nurture interest in studying language, and even students who take their initial course in the language while abroad, seem to benefit substantially, and a much larger percentage of them tend to continue language studies more intently and over a longer period of time than students either in the control group or average students in average classes in the language department on campus.

Specifically, findings from the study suggest the following:

1. 80% of the target students took at least some language before going abroad, compared to only 12% among the control group. My previous study suggests that 60% of these took the language specifically in preparation for studying abroad, and without that incentive would probably not have taken the language. This special incentive partially explains the wide variance with the control group.

2. The general trend in shifts in majors for both the target and the control groups was from the "non-relevant" or undeclared majors with 67% of the students in both groups declaring such majors in period one, to the "relevant" majors increasing from 33% in period I to 55% and 47% in the target and control groups respectively in period III.[3] This trend is predictable assuming a meaningful experience abroad, and also for a carefully selected control group. The significant statistic here seems to be the two-thirds majority of our students who are apparently going abroad for general education purposes rather than to further their major area of academic interest. This seems to justify additional attention being given to programs organized to meet general education needs of students with "non-relevant" majors.

3. During the target semester, 97% of the study abroad students took the language while abroad (exceptions were probably advanced

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[3] "Non-relevant" majors would include the physical and natural sciences, technology, nursing, pre-med and pre-law, physical education, etc., plus the general or undeclareds. "Relevant" majors include languages, humanities, social sciences, etc.) Cf. also Appendix B for "Summary of Changes in Declared Academic Majors" from the 1983 ten year study.

students taking other courses without specifically language credit, since all are involved with the language while abroad), compared to only 3% in the control group. This drop from 12% in period one to 3% in the target period seems a little exaggerated for the control since our campus average reflects a loss of only about 35-40% of one group into the next semester.

4. In period three (the post target semester) 36% of the target group continued language study compared to less than 2% in the control group.[4] This represents usually the move from second to third year and the 2% in the control is still substantially above the university average for enrollment in third year german.

5. 96% of the students in the target group who took beginning german continued on into second semester compared to 50% in the control group and 62% overall campus departmental average. In most cases with the target group, students were either still preparing to go abroad when they took their second semester or were already there so the percentage is still understandably high. Nearly all students completed at least the equivalent of second semester before returning from abroad.

6. 83% of the target students continued their language studies through the third semester compared to only 55% in the control group and 39% on-campus departmental average.

7. 44% of the target students continued into the third year of language study compared with 50% of the language students in the control group and only 15% departmental average.

8. Of the 9.3% of the students who started their study abroad without prior language training, 65% continued to second semester and 25% continued on into the third year. This compares very favorably with the 62% and 15% respective departmental averages on campus, but the significant factor with this group is that these statistics reflect activity among those students who without study abroad probably would have taken no language at all.

9. An analysis of the stats suggests that students who include study abroad in their language plans have a three to one chance of completing their third year and becoming reasonably fluent over students who start on campus and don't go abroad. There seems to be little correlation in this statistic whether the

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[4] German enrollments for students moving from second year into third year during the 1984-85 school year at BYU were 58 compared to 168 in second year, or 3.8% of the total. Total third year and above enrollments were sebstantially higher...726 of 1601 or 45% of the total, most were returned missionaries who returned to campus after spending two years abraod.

student begins language training before or during the experience abroad.5

The bottom line seems to fade in and out of focus because of a confusion over basic objectives of studying abroad, and our frequent inability to shift our focus from the traditional students whom we accept in our programs, to those who should apply but seldom do.6

My studies and experience suggest that we need to continue to build and strengthen our programs and opportunities for well prepared students, and encourage as much language acquisition before departure as possible for all participants, but perhaps we should also take a long look at what we can offer non-language students who need to fill general education requirements and get them abroad on a good general education type program, even without the language; but give them an intensive language and cultural learning experience there and bring them back converted.

We are talking about students with career paths leading to what are usually "non-international" professions such as in nursing, business, finance, medicine, law, and most of the natural sciences, and even artists (musicians, painters and other practitioners) among others,--students who would like to include a study abroad experience in their university general education requirements for personal aesthetic reasons. Many of these students will choose not to work a full year of language study into their already full academic schedule, and if required to take a year of the language before going abroad will reluctantly stay on their career track at home and forego the academic experience abroad.

In conclusion, without wanting or intending to diminish the emphasis on language in any program or experience designed for students with intermediate or advanced language skills, and without wanting to diminish the determination to encourage the right kind of student to take as much language as possible before embarking on a study abroad experience, and conceding the obvious that any experience abroad is more meaningful and rich with the language than without it, I still conclude that there is a large majority of students on my campus and perhaps others who could benefit from an experience abroad and are not participating. The

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5 25% of those beginning their language training while abroad reached the third year and 28% of those who began their language before going abroad reached the third year, while only 15% who take their language on campus reach the third year.

6 Cf Appendix C for specific data from whence many of the above conclusions are drawn.

importance of language is something many of these students may never learn (if they stay home) or may learn only after they have been abroad, if they are allowed to participate and to begin their language study there.

For the academic administrator, the only option one seems to face is whether to promote a program allowing for students with no prior foreign language experience but with a firm desire to study abroad and a willingness to study the language among other things while there, or to write them off and send them to a travel agency.

My research supports the contention that good students can benefit richly from participating in programs abroad, even without prior language experience, and their participation can directly benefit foreign language departments as well, where it counts most...in increased enrollments.

Our policy ought to be to get as many of our students involved in cross-cultural learning, foreign language acquisition, and studying abroad as possible; anyway we can. Encourage as much preparation as possible before one departs, but one should not compromise the issue of getting abroad or not getting abroad. And finally, we should not apologize for organizing or supporting general education type programs that admit even students without prior language experience.

APPENDIX A (from 1983 study)

SUMMARY OF LANGUAGE REGISTRATIONS

			German		Other Languages		Total	
SALZBURG GROUP								
BEFORE W71[1]	Students	% of total	51	94%	10	19%	61	113%
	Registrations	average courses	181	3.5	39	3.9	220	3.6
DURING W71	Students	% of total	51	100%			54	100%
	Registrations	average courses	132	2.4			132	2.4
AFTER W71	Students	% of total	27	50%	8	15%	35	65%
	Registrations	average courses	116	4.3	22	2.7	138	3.9
CONTROL GROUP								
BEFORE W71	Students	% of total	9	16%	20	36%	29	52%
	Registrations	average courses	23	2.5	69	3.4	92	3.1
DURING W71	Students	% of total	8	14%	11	20%	19	34%
	Registrations	average courses	10	1.2	15	1.3	25	1.3
AFTER W71	Students	% of total	6	11%	16	28%	232	39%
	Registrations	average courses	22	3.6	23	1.4	45	2.0

[1] W71 represents Winter Semester 1971 which is the target semester.

APPENDIX B (from 1983 study)

SUMMARY OF CHANGES IN DECLARED ACADEMIC MAJORS

Changes are considered between the academic major as declared prior to W71 and as declared during or before the student's final registration.

OF THE 54 STUDENTS IN EACH GROUP,	Salzburg	Control
1. How many had "germane" majors[1]	70%	76%
2. How many "non-germane" majors[2]	19%	13%
3. How many "general" majors[3]	15%	15%
4. How many changed majors after W71?[4]	67%	63%
5. From non-germane to germane	6%	4%
6. From germane to non-germane	7%	4%
7. From specific non-germane to general	13%	13%
8. From specific germane to general	13%	13%
9. From general to specific non-germane	2%	7%
10. From general to specific germane	4%	4%
11. Changes toward faculty emphasis[5]	15%	0%
12. Changes from faculty emphasis	6%	31%
13. Changes within a germane college	17%	13%
14. Changes within a non-germane college	2%	6%
15. Unchanged germane	26%	30%
16. Unchanged non-germane	6%	9%
17. Unchanged general	6%	2%
18. Beginning language of emphasis majors	15%	15%
19. Changes toward language of emphasis-German	7%	0%
20. Changes from language of emphasis	6%	7%
21. Unchanged language of emphasis	9%	7%
22. Ending language of emphasis majors	17%	7%

1 "Germane" for study abroad purposes are considered those in the colleges of Humanities, Fine Arts, and Family, Home and Social Sciences.

2 "Non-Germane" are primarily the natural and physical sciences, business, math, and related disciplines.

3 "General" designations include non-declared, general education, interdepartmental majors, and non-degree status.

4 "W71" is the designation for the semester in question, Winter, 1971.

5 "Faculty emphasis" disciplines for this program are departmental majors in German, Music, and Humanities--the disciplines taught by the directors/faculty.

GERMAN LANGUAGE REGISTRATIONS: VIENNA STUDENTS, 1974-80

College	#STD TRGT	GSTD T1	CORS T1	HRS T1	GSTD T2	CORS T2	HRS T2	GSTD T3	CORS T3	HRS T3	#STD CONT	GSTD C1	CORS C1	HRS C1	GSTD C2	CORS C2	HRS C2	GSTD C3	CORS C3	HRS C3
ART	6	5	15	49	6	13	37	4	8	22	9	1	3	12	0	0	0	0	0	0
ASIA/LANG	2	2	3	12	1	1	4	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
BIO/AGRI	10	6	14	43	10	19	57	2	7	20	8	1	1	4	0	0	0	0	0	0
BUSINESS	11	10	18	54	11	17	58	1	1	4	15	2	6	21	0	0	0	0	0	0
COMMUNICN	11	8	20	65	11	21	61	5	8	24	8	1	2	8	0	0	0	0	0	0
DESIGN	2	1	1	4	2	3	9	1	1	4	4	1	1	4	0	0	0	0	0	0
EDUCATION	27	21	33	117	26	48	146	6	9	30	36	3	7	27	0	0	0	0	0	0
ENG/TECH	2	2	3	12	2	3	9	0	0	0	4	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
ENGLISH	11	11	29	96	10	18	53	7	7	49	11	3	10	37	1	5	12	1	5	13
FAM/LIVING	30	23	45	148	29	61	173	17	13	35	21	1	1	4	0	0	0	0	0	0
FRENCH	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	1	3	7	0	0	0	0	0	0
GENERAL	28	24	48	164	27	50	138	3	8	23	17	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
GERMAN	3	3	14	44	2	6	18	3	15	45	2	2	9	31	2	10	28	2	12	29
HUMANITIS	15	13	40	129	15	32	88	14	48	148	4	1	5	12	1	3	9	0	0	0
MUSIC	16	14	30	98	16	28	83	4	6	17	7	1	1	4	0	0	0	0	0	0
NURSING	5	4	7	19	5	12	40	1	1	3	10	1	4	11	1	5	14	1	5	13
PHYS ED	6	5	14	43	6	9	30	2	2	6	12	1	1	4	0	0	0	0	0	0
PHYS/MATH	3	3	7	24	3	8	21	2	2	5	3	2	2	8	0	0	0	0	0	0
SOC/SCI	30	25	58	192	28	55	164	12	31	89	38	4	5	20	0	0	0	0	0	0
SPANISH	4	4	10	30	4	7	19	3	9	27	4	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
THEATRE	2	2	5	20	2	2	8	0	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
TOTALS	224	186	414	1363	216	413	1216	87	176	551	219	26	61	214	5	23	63	4	22	55
		83.0%	2.2	7.3	96.4%	1.9	5.6	38.8%	2.0	6.3		11.9%	2.3	8.2	2.3%	4.6	12.6	1.8%	5.5	13.8
College	TRGT #STD	T1 GSTD	T1 CORS	T1 HRS	T2 GSTD	T2 CORS	T2 HRS	T3 GSTD	T3 CORS	T3 HRS	CONT #STD	C1 GSTD	C1 CORS	C1 HRS	C2 GSTD	C2 CORS	C2 HRS	C3 GSTD	C3 CORS	C3 HRS

	TARGET	%	CONTROL	%	DEPT. AVERAGE	% TOT
How many students?	226		222		844	
Took German G1	182	80.5%	26	11.7%		
Took German G2	218	96.5%	5	2.3%		
Took German G3	81	35.8%	4	1.8%		
Took 101 in G1	168	74.3%	20	9.0%	204	0.8%
Took 102 in G1	94	41.6%	10	4.5%	126	0.5%
Start 2xx in G1	44	19.5%	10	4.5%	80	0.3%
Start 3xx in G1	14	6.2%	6	2.7%	31	0.1%
Took 101 in G2	21	9.3%	0	0.0%		
Took 102 in G2	89	39.4%	0	0.0%		
Start 2xx in G2	88	38.9%	1	0.5%		
Start 3xx in G2	50	22.1%	4	1.8%		
Took 101 in G3	0	0.0%	0			
Took 102 in G3	3	1.3%	0			
Start 2xx in G3	24	10.6%	0			
Start 3xx in G3	19	8.4%	0			
? of 101 to 102	186	98.4%	10	50.0%	126	61.5%
? of 101 to 201	156	82.5%	11	55.0%	80	39.1%
? of 101 to 3xx	83	43.9%	10	50.0%	31	15.0%

APPENDIX C

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